



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE CATHOLIC GUIDE AND SCOUT ASSOCIATION OF ITALY (AGESCI)**

*Saint Peter's Square
Saturday, 13 June 2015*

[Multimedia]

Dear friends of AGESCI, Good morning!

I thank you for coming in such great numbers from all the regions of Italy to form this festive presence in St Peter's Square. I greet the Chief Scout and the Chief Guide, the General Ecclesiastical Assistant, the 'Wolf Cubs' and 'Ladybugs', the 'Explorers' and 'Guides', the 'Rovers' and 'Scolte', with their community leaders and assistant priests.

I'll tell you one thing — but don't brag! —: you are a precious part of the Church in Italy. Thank you! Perhaps the youngest among you don't really realize it, but I hope the older ones do! In particular, you offer an important contribution to families for their educational mission toward the children, teens and young people. Parents entrust them to you because they are convinced of the goodness and wisdom of the Scout method, based on the greatest human values, on contact with nature, on religiosity and faith in God; a method which educates in freedom and responsibility. This trust of families must not be disappointed! And also that of the Church: I hope that you always feel you are part of the great Christian Community.

Last year in August, [I telephoned you](#) when you were gathered in the San Rossore pinewood. Do you remember? You made a national route, as you say. And you made the "Courage Charter". This "Charter" expresses your convictions and aspirations, and contains a strong demand for education and listening, to your community leaders, parishes and the Church as a whole. This demand also concerns the sphere of spirituality and faith, which are fundamental for the well-balanced and complete growth of the human person.

When someone once asked your founder, Lord Baden Powell, “where does religion come in [to scouting]?”, he responded that “Religion does not ‘come in’ at all. It is already there! There is no religious and non-religious side to the Scout Movement. The whole of it is based on religion, that is, on the awareness and service of God” (*Address to a Conference of Scout and Guide Commissioners*, Rome 1997, p. 43). He said this in 1926.

In the overview of the Scout associations on the global level, AGESCI is among those that invest the most in the field of spirituality and educating in the faith. But there is still much work to be done, in order that all community leaders may understand the importance and act accordingly.

I know that you have formative events for leaders on approaching the Bible, even with new methods, placing at the centre the narrative of life lived in relation with the Message of the Gospel. I congratulate you for this good initiative and I hope that it is not one of sporadic moments, but that they are included in a continuous and extensive plan of formation, which passes all the way through the associative fabric, rendering it permeable to the Gospel and facilitating a life change.

There is something that I take particularly to heart with regard to Catholic associations, and I would also like to speak about it with you. Associations like yours are a treasure of the Church which the Holy Spirit creates so as to evangelize all environments and sectors. I am certain that AGESCI can generate a new fervour of evangelization and a new capacity to dialogue with society. Remember: the capacity to dialogue! Build bridges, build bridges in this society where there is a tendency to build walls. You build bridges, please! With dialogue, build bridges. But this can happen only on one condition: that single groups do not lose contact with the local parish where they are based, but which in many cases they do not attend because, although carrying out their service there, they come from other areas. You are called to find a way to be integrated into the pastoral care of the particular Church, establishing relationships of esteem and cooperation at every level, with your bishops, with pastors and other priests, with educators and members of the other ecclesial associations present in the parish and in the same territory, and not to be satisfied with a “decorative” presence on Sundays or in special circumstances.

There are, in AGESCI, many groups that are already fully integrated into their diocesan and parochial reality, which know how to make the most of the formative offer proposed by the parish community to the kids, to the very young, to teenagers, to adults, attending, together with their other peers, catechesis and Christian formation groups. They do this without forsaking what is specific to Scout training. The result is a richer and more complete character. If you agree, let us go forth like this!

I thank everyone: ‘Wolf Cubs’ and ‘Ladybugs’, ‘Explorers’ and ‘Guides’, ‘Rovers’ and ‘*Scolte*’, community leaders and assistant priests. I accompany you with my prayers, but I ask you, too, to pray for me.

I wish you all a good hike!

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